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WAR WORDS

By EDGAR PRESTON

NOT so long since there was produced in London an American play so full of new and strange words that the exact sense of a good deal of the dialogue was lost on an innocent public. One of the critics suggested in his notice of the piece that a glossary of the more puzzling of these novel and racy Americanisms might with advantage be printed on the programme for the instruction of the uninitiated. The management took the hint, and promptly provided the patrons of the theatre with a list of most of the fresh words and their meanings; and all was well.

For three years and more the British public has been watching the greatest drama of all time, now, as we may hope, approaching its *dénouement*, and many people are in much the same position as the spectators of the American play: they almost need some sort of glossary to explain the vast number of new words, expressions, phrases, allusions that have come into the language by way of newspapers, magazines, official communications, letters from the Front, and otherwise since August 1914.

All the historic convulsions of the world—wars, revolutions, reformations, and renaissances—have brought in their train new sets of ideas, new facts, with, as a matter of course, new phrases, new expressions to fit them. And just as Shakespeare's rough soldiery—Pistol, Bardolph, and the rest—came back from the French Wars “full of strange oaths,”

so do our gallant fellows to-day return from France and Flanders and the other Fronts with their speech the richer for a plentiful admixture of a jargon most of which had no existence when they first went over the water to fight the world's enemy and menace. Safe back in “dear old Blighty,” with perhaps a nice “cushy” wound to his credit, or even his “ticket” (which means his discharge) in his pocket, “Old Bill,” who has had to face all sorts of “stuff,” from Wipers to Devil's Wood, is relieved to find that “Fritz” has not succeeded, either by Zepp or Gotha, in “laying his eggs” to any purpose, and that London has not been seriously “strafed,” for all the “hot air” about.

“Bill” and his comrades “Alf” and “Bert”—Captain Bruce Bairnsfather's up-to-date counterparts of *Soldiers Three*—are perfect types of the “Old Contemptibles,” otherwise the original British Expeditionary Force, the Regular Army, the paucity of which, in point of numbers, drew forth from the lips of the All-Highest the Kaiser one of the first of the many phrases worth remembering since the start of the war. Of all the foolish Imperial and Royal utterances which I propose to recall, none has proved to be so entirely unfelicitous as that in which Wilhelm the Second sneered at our “contemptible little Army.” It has indeed been a very boomerang! Hardly less unfortunate was his promise of a victorious peace “before the leaves fall”—that is to say, before the autumn of 1914. “My heart bleeds for Louvain!” was another of

the Kaiser's early achievements in phrase-making; but he was not revealed at quite his best until—America having come into the war—Mr. Gerard was free to record some of his conversations with him during the period when the United States Ambassador was in the position of a neutral in Berlin. "There is no longer any international law," he exclaimed on one occasion. On another (*risum teneatis?*) this *impayable* Emperor declared "he wanted to carry on the war in a knightly manner"; and, again, on the subject of the sinking of the *Lusitania*! "No gentleman would kill so many women and children!"

Captain-Lieutenant Hersing, the criminal referred to, had nevertheless received from the Emperor's hand the Order "Pour le Mérite." Unfortunately, Mr. Gerard did not inquire precisely how many women and children it were permissible for a Hun officer to kill—and remain a gentleman. Count Luxburg, of *spurlos versenkt*—or "sink without trace"—notoriety, was foolish or unfortunate enough to be found out, so there was no Imperial and Royal reward for *him*. Nevertheless, he will long be remembered for his infamous phrase.

But the making of what, for convenience's sake, may be called "War Words" actually began before the war itself: to be exact, with the half-angry, half-incredulous inquiry of the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, whether Great Britain was really going to fight over a mere "scrap of paper" like the treaty guaranteeing the independence of Belgium. This was about the end of July 1914. Only a few days later the Chancellor was at it again with his memorable *durchbauen* speech, in which, it will be remembered, he blurted out that "necessity knows no law," and that it was imperative for Germany to "hack her way through Belgium." Our own spokesmen were soon off the mark, Mr. "Wait-and-

See" Asquith showing the way to the "Old Gang" with the speech in which he made the oft-quoted remark about drawing the sword and not sheathing it until justice and reparation should have been done. Meanwhile, Mr. Lloyd George was telling us "silver bullets" would win the war, and "Business as usual" was the cry in certain quarters; even while Great Britain's declaration of war was pending the *Daily News* was not ashamed to urge neutrality, with all the commercial advantages it supposed would be attached to that miserable attitude. Soon, however, as a welcome change, we heard of "a certain liveliness" in the North Sea, that cheery euphemism, signifying a nice little victory for Sir David Beatty and his merry men.

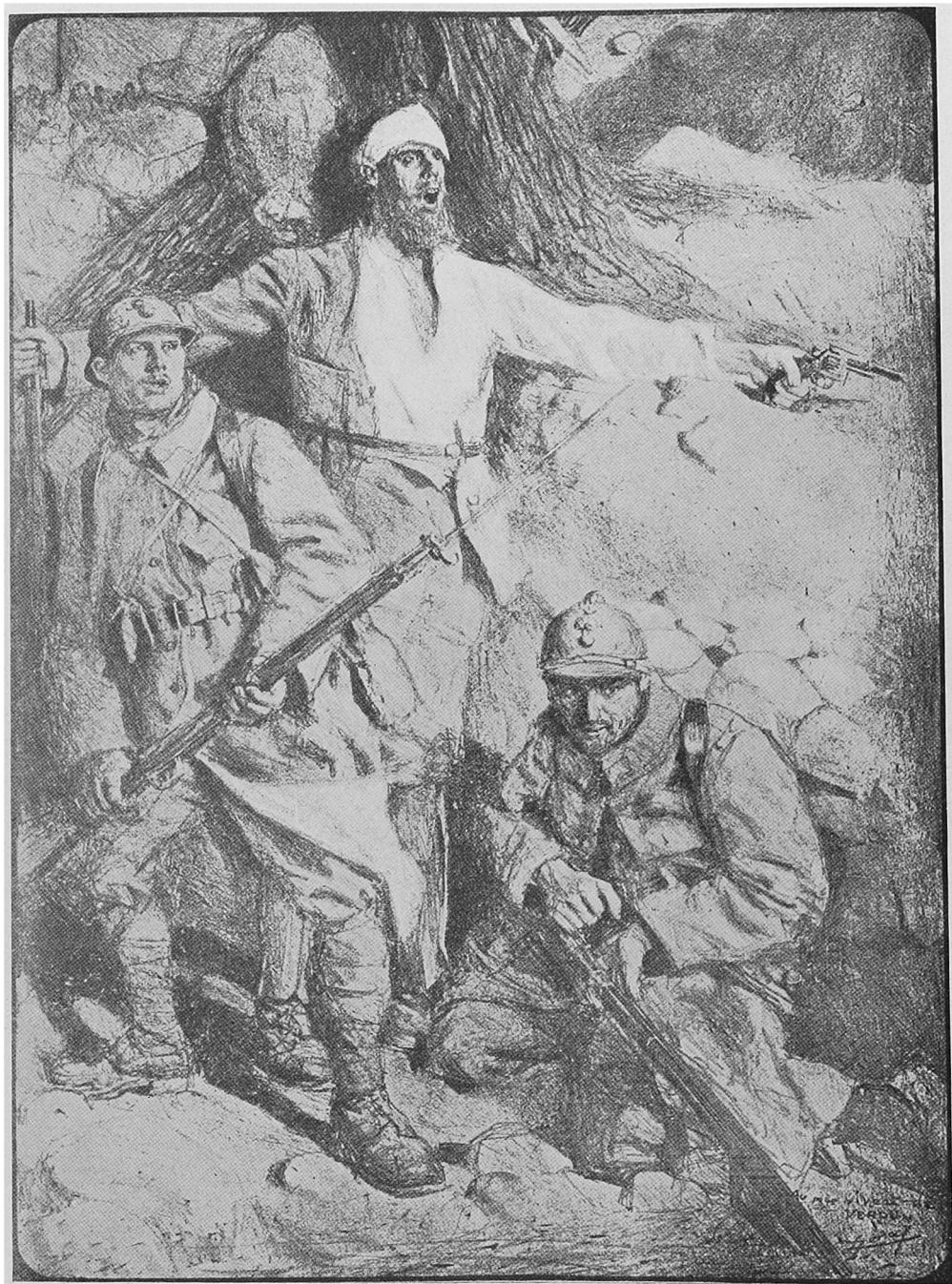
Already Lord Haldane had edified the Germans by announcing that "Germany is my spiritual home," this being explained some time later by one of his many apologists as meaning that the ex-War Minister had studied philosophy in the Fatherland, at the feet of the mild Professor Lotze. And while Count Reventhal in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* was beginning to throw out dreadful hints about "methods of Frightfulness"—he being "Apostle" of that same—Mr. Winston Churchill was busy telling the world what we would do to the Germans when we caught 'em. As for their High-Seas Fleet, they would be "dug out like rats in a hole." And with regard to air raids, with which we were soon to be made familiar, our aviators, on the first approach of hostile airships, would immediately go up and attack them "like a swarm of hornets." Neither of these bombastic similes, as events have proved, was particularly well found, and we may congratulate ourselves that there has not been much of this kind of thing since the nation slowly came to realize the true meaning of all that is happening. "Dark-

ness and composure" was the meek official recipe prescribed as the only remedy for the Zeppelin menace when the big gas-bags first came over. Since then something very much better has been found, in the shape of speedy fighting aeroplanes spitting useful bullets; while for the "Gothas" which have succeeded those conspicuous failures, the vulnerable "Zepps," we like to believe the new "barrage" defence is proving efficacious. "Reprisals" is not a new word, but it has a new significance to-day, especially since Mr. Lloyd George, on seeing the damage done in some poor, working quarter during one of these unpleasant visitations, is said to have promised to "give the Germans hell" in return, and by similar means. Perhaps the most striking of the other recent phrases to the credit of the Prime Minister is the well-known "There must be no 'next time,'" which occurred in his speech made in August last on the Pope's peace proposals. "We must see this war right through," he meant, "and take good care to provide against the recurrence of any such calamity." Finely expressed, too, was Mr. Lloyd George's tribute to the men of the "First Army," which "gathered all the German spears in their breast." But the phrase with the real "punch" in it is Lord Rhondda's. He was on the *Lusitania* when she was torpedoed; and on his way to land he vowed to "get level with Satan's Chief of Staff, that blasphemous hypocrite the Kaiser."

Before passing on to the most interesting of all the words the war has produced —those of our own fighting men still in the thick of it—one may recall a few more phrases, some of which will not soon be forgotten. Of these is President Wilson's "too proud to fight." Most people on this side of the Atlantic received the *mot*—for such it is—with scorn and derision; and really at the time it

looked as though the President was letting his known dialectic skill do duty for something more solid and statesmanlike. All the world knows better now; knows that it was only Dr. Woodrow Wilson's extraordinarily keen realization of the tremendous issues involved, and of the vastness of the responsibility resting upon his action that caused him to delay to the last possible minute the uttering of the word that should plunge the Republic into the arena of war. An ingenious correspondent, writing to one of the newspapers, had meantime solved the difficulty of the phrase by means of a couple of commas, thus: "America, too, proud to fight!" Q.E.D. Then there was the stern "Ils ne passeront pas!" of the French armies defending Verdun and crumpling up the "Clown" Prince's hordes; and the inimitable "Soldiers don't wear collars!" the impatient dictum of the harassed "brass hat" at the War Office when people urged that the discharged soldier ought not to be turned out of the Army clothed in a shocking reach-me-down suit, and with neck swathed in a coster's neckerchief instead of a decent white linen collar. It is satisfactory to know that since this priceless official made the remark soldiers *do* wear collars!

"The Russian Steam-roller," one of the earliest of the expressions that have "stuck," seems very ancient to-day. Much has happened since to our luckless Ally, and nothing that has come out of the deposition of "Nicky" and the subsequent hurly-burly has been of any advantage to the rest of the Entente Powers. When people first talked and wrote about the "steam-roller" philo-Russians were somewhat aggrieved at the suggested slowness of the pace at which the Tsar's armies were advancing. Now, after three years, any rate of progression, however dilatory, would be welcome. Perhaps it



“ILS NE PASSERONT PAS!”

The famous war phase first used by the army of Verdun when it interposed the living wall that barred the way of the Germans to Verdun.—From the drawing by Lucien Jonas, in *The Graphic*, London.

is not too much to hope that even now it is not too late for the machine to "get a move on!" Another phrase that takes one back a long way is Marshal Joffre's memorable "Je grignotte," which has an expressive brevity characteristic of that fine old soldier. Meanwhile, thanks to Pétain and the others, the "nibble" has become something more like a bite, and not a small bite either. *Jusqu'auboutiste*, for him who means to see things through right to the end, strikes one as rather happy, and so does the pretty little word "Dora," to stand for Defence of the Realm Act. "Anzac" is a word that was in great danger at one time of being not only misused, but prostituted for commercial purposes. Its exact and proper significance is Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, and only those Australian and New Zealand troops who fought so gamely and suffered such terrible losses in the ill-starred Gallipoli operations are qualified to hold the title. Therefore the careless general use of the word "Anzac," as signifying any Australian or any New-Zealander, is altogether unjustifiable. The real, authentic "Anzacs" have now a distinguishing badge; and it is their proudest decoration. When the Huns first made the acquaintance of the so-called "Tanks" in the Somme offensive of July 1916 they were by no means inclined to laugh at these grotesque-looking engines of war; yet, serious and important as is its function, the "Tank" has always been something of a joke, not only to the men at the Front, but also to us at home. Its comic attributes made it the chief success of the Lord Mayor's Show only the other day. Not until the programme of the procession was published in the newspapers did the "man in the street" make the great discovery that there are two kinds of Tanks, the male and the female.

I have been told wherein the difference lies, but have already forgotten it. The name "Tank," by the way, is a good example of the *lucus a non lucendo* method of nomenclature, for the monster is not a tank, does not look like a tank, and has nothing to do with tanks. "Tank," it may be added, is the soldier's name for the wet canteen. Hence, to be "tanked" or "tanked up" is to show signs of having stayed therein just a little too long. Of more recent invention still are "conchy" for "conscientious objector," and "Boloism" for the dirty work of "the hidden hand." Paul Bolo, *alias* Bolo Pasha, the renegade Levantine Frenchman who has been handling so much German money, may have earned immortality of a sort for himself and his comic-opera name after all! Meanwhile, the important question for ourselves over here is: "Who are our British Bolos?" Who are the premature peacemongers insidiously and unceasingly working for a thwarted, desperate enemy against Great Britain and her Allies, by means of a persistent propaganda all over the country and in all ranks of the community? That is what every one wants to know in this fourth year of the war.

From the enemy there have swum into our ken a few words which can never be forgotten. First of all *Kultur*, full consideration of which would demand a treatise to itself. Whatever it may mean to the Hun, the word now stands with the rest of the world as the exact antithesis of all that is meant by "civilization." *Machtpolitik*, *Weltpolitik*, like such technical terms as *Flammenwerfer*, *Minenwerfer*, *Feldgrau*, explain themselves. Every one knows the *Hassgesang*, or "Hymn of Hate," of Ernst Lissauer, and what it stands for; but *kaputt* is in another category. It signifies "done for," or "it's all up," and derives, in all probability from the Latin *caput*. When the sentence

was "Off with his head!" it was certainly "all up" with a man. *Kanonenfutter* ("Cannon fodder"), as a description of the "common soldier," is typically Prussian; while *Schrecklichkeit* (Frightfulness) is just one of those hideous words which, as some one has happily remarked, "sound like a blood sausage frizzling in an iron pan." The German toast, *Der Tag*, is familiar enough, and so are *Kommandantur* and *Drang nach Osten*, the pressure towards the East, best exemplified in the famous Berlin-Bagdad Railway project. Last comes the utterly prostituted *Kamerad*, never used by the Hun save when he cries for mercy, and generally preceded by that word. Honest old "camarade" or "comrade," has indeed been debased by the touch of the Teuton.

France provides a number of new terms full of meaning and of enduring quality. Henceforth the German will always be the "Boche" or "Bosch"; and when a Frenchman or—especially—a Frenchwoman has ejaculated *sale Boche* it is clear there is no more to be said about an unsavoury subject. No one seems to know exactly why the Boche is so called throughout France. If you inquire you will probably receive in reply something like the classic answer of the professional cricketer, when asked by the old gentleman why a certain ball was called a "yorker": "Well, what else could you call it?" Another word that will survive the war is *camouflage*, comely, essentially French, and, above all, useful, since it expresses so many things hitherto lacking the right word. It is a War Word in the sense that it was not in existence three years ago. You may search all the dictionaries without finding *camouflage* in any one of them. *Camouflet* is there, signifying, among other things, an affront, probably for the reason that originally to "give a *camouflet*" to any one was to

blow smoke up his nostrils through a tube of smouldering paper. This throws no light on *camouflage*, but in a dictionary of so recent a date as 1916 I find the verb *camoufler* (to disguise, to "rig out"), which conveys the sense of the substantive. When the gunners screen their gun-emplacement with branches, giving it the innocent appearance of a leafy bower; when the cavalryman paints stripes on the flanks of his charger, making it resemble the wellnigh invisible zebra; when the courageous British officer with a working knowledge of the local *patois* goes into the enemy's lines in the rig of a French or Flemish peasant—it is *camouflage* every time, *camouflage* pure and simple.

Yet another term that has come to stay is *poilu*, which has quite superseded the old, familiar *pioupiou* to describe the French equivalent of our own valiant "Tommy." Here, again, the derivation of the word is not altogether clear. But since *poilu* means "hairy," and hairy men are supposed to be strong, and the strong are, presumably, brave, it may well be considered a suitable enough name for the tough, tenacious, cheery foot-soldier of the Republic who, as often as not, takes his full beard with him into the trenches. *Barrage*, or "curtain-fire," is by now as well known here as across the Channel, particularly since we have been "putting up a barrage" as a protection against raiding Goths. *Rosalie* is the poetical name for bayonet. In the early days of the war Théodore Botrel, the popular Breton poet, then—and perhaps still—*chansonnier aux armées*, wrote a little marching song called "Rosalie," and set it to a tune so stirring that it was soon popular in the French ranks. Botrel it was who wrote the bitter punning quatrain angrily described by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as "Chauvinistic, cock-a-hoop tingle-tangle." The lines are

put into the mouth of a French châtelaine whose mansion has been ransacked and befouled by a horde of *Boches*. As the intruders depart she flings this at them:

La France a subi les ravages,
Messieurs, de trois hordes sauvages:
Goths, Ostrogoths, et Visigoths.
Il lui manquait les—Saligoths!

The *Frankfurter* explains, for the benefit of such of its readers as may have no French, that *Saligoths* has exactly the same pronunciation as *saligauds*, meaning *Schweinigl*, or dirty pigs. The type we call "slacker" or "Cuthbert" our French friends dub *embusqué*; and the lucky soldier who gets a lady at home to take an interest in his welfare while he is floundering in the mud at the Front becomes the *filleul* to her *marraine*. Some of the godmothers are reputed to have half a dozen or more godsons in their charge, and some of the men are credited with quite a number of godmothers. The only purely Belgian expression I have come across that seems to deserve mention is *jasse*, which means much the same thing as we mean by "Tommy" and the French mean by *poilu*.

Our fighting men are not, nor ever have been, "downhearted." At all times and at all seasons they will put the question to themselves, and the answer is invariably a stentorian "No!" Nothing can alter their gay determination to make light of all their troubles, since this is of course the best way to ease them. Their philosophy is summed up in one of their favourite expressions: "Nothing to write home about!" which crystallizes an attitude of stoical, half-amused indifference respecting that which Fate may have in store or may already have dealt out. So T. Atkins goes serenely "over the top" into "no man's land," and as like as not the next that is heard of him is that he has "gone West," which is the soldier's

poetical way of expressing what the "civvy" calls "making the great sacrifice." Or perhaps it is not quite so tragic as all that, and he "gets a cushy one." This means he has received a wound, not dangerous, but severe enough to cause him to be sent to a base hospital and thence, maybe, to "Blighty." These are two of the commonest of Army words, but though by no means new they were not known to the great public before the war. "Cushy" derives probably from the Hindustani *Kusbi* (anything soft or agreeable); though some connect it with the French *coucher*, a not impossible derivation, seeing that the patient will be a "lying-down case." "Blighty" also is a word the Old Army picked up years ago in India. *Bilati*, among the natives, stood for "abroad"; hence to them it signified the place where the British soldier came from. Getting as near as need be to the word with "Blighty," our chaps made it stand for "Home," and so it will always stand now. But before getting over the water to "Blighty" the man who has "got a packet" (been wounded) may have to undergo an operation. This he calls "going to the pictures."

For the airman *rien n'est sacré*. Everything is a "stunt" with this new and delightful type of "golden lad." He steadfastly refuses to take himself or anybody or anything else too seriously, and he has a vocabulary which is all his own. Bad weather is "dud" weather; his new and expensive machine is "my old bus"; his tunic is a "maternity jacket"; the control lever of his 'plane a "joy-stick"; and his small scouting machine, Sopwith or otherwise, a "pup." The young flying man is probably the soberest creature alive—so far as drink is concerned—and for the best of reasons; but if he *should* exceed he is said to be "blotto." To be nervous is to be "all of a doodah." A beginner is termed

a "Hun" in the R.F.C. and a "quirk" in the R.N.A.S. When he is qualifying for a commission in "the Navy that flies," his "wings are sprouting," and "tail-chasing" is one of the "stunt merchant's" many daring tricks in the air. When he goes up alone he "goes up solo"; a triplane is to him a "tripehound"; a two-seater is a "camel," and when he's "Arched" by anti-aircraft guns he feels the "shell-bumps." Then is the time to "side-slip," or "spiral" or "zigzag," or perhaps to "zum." He's a great boy!

It will perhaps be remarked that in this discursive and, of course, far from complete dissertation on "War Words," no reference has been made to the Navy, nor have any expressions current among the fighting men from the Dominions Overseas or from America been included.

As regards the Senior Service there is not much to be gleaned in this field, for the reason that while the argot of the lower deck is rich and picturesque as any, very little of it reaches the shore, where, save among his intimates, the sailor is by training and habit "a man of few words." Consequently, his vocabulary does not come to the ears of the public, nor to its eyes, because, however exciting his experiences, Jack is of opinion that "there's nothing to write home about." As for the stalwart fellows from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the States, it is well known they have an abundant store of colloquialisms, full of all that is racy and *imprévu*. Perhaps it may be possible to make and present a selection from among them one of these days.—*The National Review, London.*

The entry of the United States into the war has been of too recent date and its active participation too slight to have enabled Americans to create a distinctive vocabulary of reactions to the conflict; nevertheless, there are a few which our readers doubtless will readily recall. In addition to the President's "too proud to fight" already quoted, there is his other historic phrase, "To make the world safe for democracy." "I believe in peace, and war is the only way to obtain it," was designed to pacify the pacifists. "Can the Kaiser" is distinctively soldiers' slang, and "Rainbow division" refers to the diversity of the units constituting this body of troops. "Give my regards to Broadway" is a song writer's refrain which awakens sentimental memories, and to the same source we are indebted for "Send him away with a smile." "Liberty Loan" and "Liberty Motor" are directly expressive of American ideals, and "First to fight" is the proud motto of the marine corps. As our countrymen are particularly apt at phrase-making, we may expect soon to have a considerable addition to the picturesque and colorful glossary of war, although nothing has been evolved as yet which is as forceful and unforgettable as the Civil War's "War is hell," "Unconditional surrender," or "We'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," not to mention the slogan of the Spanish War, "Remember the Maine," or Dewey's celebrated order at Manila Bay, "Fire when ready, Mr. Gridley."—Ed.